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PUERTO RICO: COMMONWEALTH, STATEHOOD, OR INDEPENDENCE?
(TAPE INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

INTRO:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND PUERTO RICO IS EXPECTED TO SURFACE AGAIN AT THIS WEEK'S CONFERENCE OF NON-ALIGNED NATIONS IN COLOMBO, SRI LANKA. IT IS AN ISSUE THAT HAS BEEN RAISED REPEATEDLY IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS -- USUALLY BY CUBA. THE HAVANA GOVERNMENT CHARGES THAT PUERTO RICO IS AN AMERICAN COLONY AND SHOULD BECOME INDEPENDENT OF AMERICAN JURISDICTION.

THE PUERTO RICAN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES IS ALSO A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE SMALL ISLAND'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGN -- JUST AS IT HAS BEEN IN EVERY ELECTION CAMPAIGN SINCE PUERTO RICO BECAME A COMMONWEALTH OF THE UNITED STATES IN NINETEEN FIFTY-TWO. VOA'S DAVID MCALARY HAS A REPORT.

ANNCR:

CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE IN PUERTO RICO ARE CAMPAIGNING THIS YEAR WITH AN OLD THEME: SHOULD PUERTO RICO REMAIN A SELF-GOVERNING COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED STATES; SHOULD IT BECOME AMERICA'S FIFTY-FIRST STATE; OR SHOULD IT BECOME INDEPENDENT?

AS FAR AS PUERTO RICANS ARE CONCERNED, INDEPENDENCE APPARENTLY IS NOT FOR THEM. EDITOR ALEX MALDONADO OF THE SAN JUAN NEWSPAPER EL MUNDO EXPLAINS:

<u>TAPE: CUT ONE -- MALDONADO</u>

"THE PRO-INDEPEDENCE FORCES IN PUERTO RICO HAVE A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM. THAT IS, THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE -- WHEN ASKED TO VOTE ON THE QUESTION -- VOTE OVERWHELMINGLY AGAINST INDEPENDENCE. THERE IS ALWAYS A PRO-INDEPENDENCE PARTY ON THE BALLOT, WHICH IN THE LAST ELECTION GOT FOUR-POINT-THREE PERCENT OF THE VOTE. AND WE DO HAVE FREE ELECTIONS HERE. MORE THAN EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE, VOTE.

SO I THINK THAT'S A VERY CLEAR AND POWERFUL EXPRESSION OF WHAT THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO THINK."

ANNCR:

PROPONENTS OF STATEHOOD DO MUCH BETTER IN ELECTIONS THAN THE INDEPENDENCE FORCES. IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-TWO, THE PRO-STATEHOOD NEW PROGRESSIVE PARTY WON FORTY-FOUR PERCENT OF THE VOTE, TAKING THE SAN JUAN MAYOR'S OFFICE AND SEVERAL SEATS IN THE PUERTO RICAN LEGISLATURE. (OPT) FOUR YEARS EARLIER -- IN NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT -- THE NEW PROGRESSIVES HAD EVEN PUT THEIR CANDIDATE -- LUIS FERRE -- INTO THE GOVERNORSHIP. BUT THAT HAS BEEN THE ONLY TIME SINCE NINETEEN-FIFTY-TWO THE PARTY HAS WON THAT OFFICE. (END OPT)

THE TRADITIONAL FRONT-RUNNING PARTY IN PUERTO RICO HAS BEEN THE PRO-COMMONWEALTH POPULAR DEMOCRATIC PARTY. THEY HAVE WON THE GOVERNORSHIP EVERY ELECTION EXCEPT NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT, AND THEY HAVE ALWAYS DOMINATED THE LEGISLATURE.

POPULAR DEMOCRATS STAND FOR CONTINUED COMMONWEALTH STATUS WITH THE UNITED STATES BECAUSE THEY THINK IT IS MUCH BETTER THAN BEING A STATE. AND APPARENTLY, SO DO MOST PUERTO RICAN VOTERS AS A COMMONWEALTH, PUERTO RICO HAS MANY OF THE ADVANTAGES OF STATEHOOD WITHOUT SOME OF THE IMPORTANT OBLIGATIONS. ITS CITIZENS ARE U-S CITIZENS. ITS TRADE WITH THE UNITED STATES IS DUTY-FREE. WASHINGTON DEFENDS THE ISLAND AND RUNS ITS MAIL AND MONEY SYSTEMS. AND PUERTO RICO HAS ABOUT AS MUCH CONTROL OF ITS INTERNAL AFFAIRS AS A STATE HAS. YET IT IS RELEASED FROM SOME OF THE ECONOMIC OBLIGATIONS STATES HAVE. THIS IS EXPLAINED BY CELESTE BENITES RODRIGUEZ, A POPULAR DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR SENATOR-AT-LARGE IN THE ISLAND LEGISLATURE:

<u>TAPE: CUT TWO -- BENITES</u>

"FOR ONE THING, PUERTO RICANS DO NOT PAY FEDERAL INCOME TAXES. AND ON THE OTHER HAND WE ARE ALLOWED BY OUR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

WITH THE UNITED STATES TO OFFER INDUSTRIES WHICH ARE ESTABLISHED HERE IN PUERTO RICO TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR A PERIOD OF UP TO TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. AND THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN THE PRINCIPAL CAUSE FOSTERING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INDUSTRIES IN PUERTO RICO, WHICH (IS RESPONSIBLE) FOR THE RAPID GROWTH OF OUR ISLAND."

ANNCR:

DESPITE THE INDUSTRY BOOM, THE RECENT ECONOMIC RECESSION HAS HIT THE ISLAND HARD. UNEMPLOYMENT IS ALWAYS HIGH THERE, BUT NOW IT IS OFFICIALLY UP TO NINETEEN PERCENT. AND POVERTY STILL ABOUNDS. NEW PROGRESSIVE GUBERNATIONAL CANDIDATE ROMERO BARCELO -- NOW MAYOR OF SAN JUAN -- SAYS PUERTO RICO COULD DEAL WITH THESE CONDITIONS BETTER AS A STATE. HE EXPLAINS THAT THE ISLAND WOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR LARGE AMOUNTS OF FEDERAL AID NOT NOW AVAILABLE.

(OPT) MISTER BARCELO ALSO OPPOSES LEGISLATION BEFORE THE U-S CONGRESS TO GIVE PUERTO RICO MORE AUTONOMY OVER ITS INTERNAL AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WHILE KEEPING THE BASIC COMMONWEALTH RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES THE SAME. HE ARGUES THAT PUERTO RICO STANDS TO LOSE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN AID IT DOES GET FROM WASHINGTON IF THE BILL IS ENACTED. (END OPT)

OTHERS WHO SUPPORT STATEHOOD FEEL THAT AS LONG AS PUERTO RICO HAS ABOUT THE SAME AUTONOMY AS A STATE, IT SHOULD BE A STATE AND HAVE MORE REPRESENTATION IN WASHINGTON THAN THE ONE COMMISSIONER IT IS ALLOWED THERE AS A COMMONWEALTH. THE MAN WHO BECAME THE NEW PROGRESSIVE GOVERNOR IN NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT -- LUIS FERRE -- IS ONE PERSON WITH THIS POINT OF VIEW:

<u>TAPE: CUT THREE -- FERRE</u>

"IN THE FIRST PLACE, WE WILL HAVE VOTING MEMBERS IN CONGRESS -- TWO SENATORS AND MAYBE SIX OR SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE. THAT MEANS THAT IT IS VERY IMPORTANT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE LEGISLATION THAT AFFECTS PUERTO RICO, AND ALSO THE NATION. WE WILL HAVE TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL DEBATES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE MAKING OF THE LAWS THAT AFFECT THE WHOLE NATION. WE WOULD VOTE

FOR THE PRESIDENT, AND THAT OF COURSE WOULD BE IMPORTANT FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF HAVING THE PRESIDENT LOOKING TO PUERTO RICO AS A NATIONAL PROBLEM RATHER THAN A LOCAL PROBLEM. AND THEREFORE, PUERTO RICO WOULD BE ENJOYING TO THE FULLEST LIMIT ALL THE ENORMOUS (POTENTIAL) OF THE COUNTRY."

ANNCR:

MISTER FERRE CLAIMS THAT PUERTO RICO STATEHOOD IS INEVITABLE. IF HIS NEW PROGRESSIVE PARTY PUTS ROMERO BARCELO INTO THE GOVERNOR' CHAIR, MISTER FERRE SAYS THERE WILL BE A PLEBISCITE ON THE ISSUE.

FOR NOW, THOUGH, THE ISLAND IS WHAT ITS SPANISH NAME CALLS A FREE ASSOCIATED STATE -- A SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORY FREELY AND VOLUNTARILY ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED STATES. IF A CHANGE TO STATEHOOD IS PREFERRED, PUERTO RICAN VOTERS WILL GIVE THE SIGNAL THIS NOVEMBER.

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